United Nations A/C.5/54/27

General Assembly

Distr.: General
28 October 1999

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Fifth Committee
Agenda item 121
Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001

Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 Section 26, Public Information

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in the context of its consideration of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001,[1] noted that an amount of $206,100 had been requested to cover the cost of personal service contracts related, *inter alia*, to the creation of search programmes and databases for the United Nations Web site in official languages other than English. The Advisory Committee pointed out that no statement of programme budget implications had been submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session in connection with the adoption of resolution 53/208 C of 18 December 1998, and requested that cost estimates and a related Secretariat-wide plan be presented to the Assembly at the main part of its fifty-fourth session.

2. In its resolution 53/208 C, the General Assembly noted with appreciation that the Department of Public Information had launched United Nations Web sites in Russian, Arabic and Chinese; stressed the need for continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites with a view to achieving equal treatment of the six official languages on those Web sites; and requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals in that connection to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session through the Committee on Conferences and the Committee on Information.

3. In response to that request, the Secretary-General submitted a report (A/AC.198/1999/6) to the Committee on Information at the first part of its twenty-first session, in May 1999, outlining three proposals of a general nature aimed at addressing the issue of equitable treatment of all United Nations official languages, together with an indication of the magnitude of the resource requirements for the development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites. The Committee on Conferences, at its 421st meeting, held on 31 August, took note of the report.

4. As indicated in the report, of the three proposals on the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations Web site, proposal A would seek to achieve full parity among all United Nations official languages by the end of 2001. The resource requirement for that proposal was estimated at $560 million as a one-time investment during the biennium 2000-2001 and approximately $26 million per biennium, excluding staff costs, for recurring expenditures thereafter. Proposal B would seek to achieve parity of all other United Nations official languages with the English-language site on an incremental basis. The resource requirements for proposal B would be equivalent to those of proposal A, but the estimated one-time investment of $560

99-32044 (E) 291099

million would be spread over a longer period of time. Proposal C would seek to balance the need for parity and the realistic availability of resources. Efforts would be concentrated on bolstering the existing set-ups. Under this proposal, the United Nations Web site would be developed in all official languages as staff and other resources permit, and parity would be introduced in modules. The number and timing of implementation of various language modules would be dependent on the level of resources that could be made available.

5. Having considered the report of the Secretary-General and the three proposals presented therein, the Committee on Information, in its resolution B, adopted on 14 May 1999,[2] took note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/1999/6) and requested him to further develop his proposals pertaining to proposal C in a cost-effective manner and with a focus on textual content, including programme budget implications, for consideration by the Committee on Information and other relevant bodies.

6. In response to that request, the Secretary-General has submitted a report (A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1) on proposal C outlining three options, together with an indication of the level of resource requirements, for consideration by the Committee on Information at its resumed twenty-first session in November.

7. Of the three options under proposal C, the first option would entail the translation and rendering of the contents of the present United Nations Web site into all official languages on an incremental basis with no specific time-frame for achieving full parity. It would also require a feasibility study to determine the time-frame for implementation and the level of resource requirements for a Secretariat-wide plan. The second option would involve translation of selected basic modules, including the audio-visual module, and making them available on the Web site on an ongoing basis. Such modules would be decided upon by the content-providing offices with guidance from Member States. As in the case of the first option, this would also require a feasibility study to determine the time-frame for implementation and the level of resource requirements for a Secretariat-wide plan. The cost of such a feasibility study, if either of these options is chosen, is estimated at $100,000.

8. The third option would seek to establish a sound foundation for current Web site enhancement and maintenance activities. Additional modules would be made available on an ongoing basis as the usage level increases. In order to ensure a broad range of available material, modules would not necessarily be translated in their entirety or into all languages. Efforts would be made to adapt, for Web publishing, the multilingual audio-visual products already available in the conventional format. The resource requirements under this option are estimated at $13.5 million for the biennium 2000-2001 to allow the Department of Public Information to build on the existing structures and to gradually add new material in all official languages to the Web site.

9. The report of the Secretary-General outlining the three options under proposal C (A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1) will be considered by the Committee on Information at its resumed twenty-first session in November. Should the Committee make recommendations that would have programme budget implications, a statement will be prepared prior to its adoption of such recommendations. The decisions and recommendations of the Committee on Information in this regard will be considered by the Special Political and Decolonization (Fourth) Committee of the General Assembly.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/54/6/Rev.1), vol. III, para. 26.53.

[2] Ibid., *Supplement No. 21* (A/54/21), chap. IV.